

Russia's Balkan Plan Made World War Loom In 1912, Papers Reveal

By CAPTAIN GEORGE ABEL SCHREINER.

Collated from the Documents in the Possession of, and Translated Political and War Correspondent of the Associated Press During the Great War; Author of "The Iron Ration" "From Berlin to Baghdad," "The Craft Sinister," Etc.

By COUNT B. VON SIEBERT.

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The following is the fourth installment of this amazing story of secret diplomacy, the third having appeared last Sunday in The Washington Times.

The second phase of the Balkan war of 1912 shows Russia's foreign policy as reckless as ever it was; it shows that the French government, then in the hands of Poincaré in the international department, was still bent upon getting a chance to revenge 1870-1, and it shows that the British government remained ever true to its time-honored policy of having other states pull the chestnut out of the fire.

The success of the Balkan allies in their campaign against Turkey was swift and complete, due mainly to the valor of the Bulgarian troops. Sazonoff had discovered that in Sofia his word did not go as far as in Belgrade, and his agents had discovered that the Bulgarian general staff had plans for the occupation of Constantinople. The reports from Benckendorff, the Russian ambassador to London, showed that the British press and public were in favor of having the Turk ousted from Europe, so long as there was assurance of putting the pro-British Bulgars on the Bosphorus and Dardanelles.

The attitude of Russia showed that

the question which was nearest to the heart of the Russians. The polite easiness of Grey was finally properly understood, and thus it came that Sazonoff decided to support with might and main the claims of Serbia to a port on the Adriatic at the expense of the autonomous Albania, of which there had been much talk in the capitals of Europe.

But Austria-Hungary did not want to have in the Adriatic a Serbian port, which the Russian navy could use as a base in the Mediterranean. Great Britain, also, was averse to have a Russian naval base in the Mediterranean.

There are dozens of documents that speak of the intemperance of the Serbian government in this crisis and the needless provocations that were engineered at Belgrade, many of them under the aegis of M. Hartwig, the Russian minister to Serbia.

Sazonoff found it hard to get the French and British public excited. Time and again Sazonoff caused Grey to be sounded on the question of opening hostilities against Austria-Hungary and Germany. The British undersecretary of state, Sir Arthur Nicholson, encouraged Benckendorff all he could, but Grey, while willing to listen, remained disinclined to make his position clear to Sazonoff's agents.

POINCARÉ WAS WILLING TO STRIKE AT GERMANY.

He promised that under certain conditions he would go to war against the Central powers, but never defined these conditions, even after Poincaré had declared quite frankly that France would do what Russia would do, to wit: Go to war against Austria-Hungary and against Germany.

Finally Sazonoff, seeing himself defeated, attempted the promotion of better relations with Turkey. Grey was to have a severe test presently. Greece had let it be understood that she wanted to retain as her principal spoils, the island of Crete.

The Russian minister at London to M. Sazonoff. Telegram dated 8-21, 1912, No. 269.

Grey has certain doubts regarding Crete. He thinks the fate of this island should be determined by all the great powers in concert, including Turkey. Here I interpose that surely I was right in assuming that England herself had

Wilhelm Der Chopper's "Flo" Going, Going, Gone, In Chicago.

CHICAGO, April 3.—A bed which Wilhelm Der Chopper often used, the couch no doubt of imperial dreams about beaten France and abject England and humbled United States, was sold at public auction in Chicago.

With it went a magnificent wardrobe wherein the imperial had been soaked, a massive wardrobe once containing all the Kaiser's medaled uniforms, chairs used by Hohenzollern and a miscellaneous assortment of carved woodwork under which the All Highest frequently strutted.

Before November 11, 1918, three flossy relics were the contents of the royal bedroom in the castle of the Grand Duke of Hesse, "Me and Gott" often sojourned there in those days. When the tumble came and the bedroom's imperial occupant hopped it into Holland the grand duke began looking for the nearest exit. He shipped the stuff to Chicago, where it is being disposed of at public auction.

not cast her eyes upon those islands? In reply Grey said to me:

"By no means," he said.

Face to face for the first time with seeing the triple entente and the Balkans at work militarily, Sir Edward Grey made some changes in his policy. At the end of a conversation with him, Benckendorff, in Telegram No. 270, same date as No. 269, reported to Sazonoff following:

"The entire conversation with Grey proves that he has completely veered round in his opinions, in the interests of the maintenance of the entente, and that he resolves for the sake of the entente, to grant far greater concessions at the cost of Turkey than he was prepared to grant hitherto."

ENTENTE WINS POINT WITH ENGLISHMAN.

The substance of his telegrams, Nos. 269 and 270, Count Benckendorff repeated in a letter to M. Sazonoff, dated October 9-22, 1912.

Yesterday I sent you several telegrams of the Russian ambassador, particularly one in which Grey accepts your proposal with reference to an immediate exchange of views.

"First Grey spoke of the reproach leveled against him as being too considerate of the Caliph. Then he discussed the Sultan's remaining at Constantinople, reforms, and territorial integrity.

"As regards the nominal Turkish sovereignty, his words mean that he would concede a minimum. So many forms of Turkish sovereignty have already been found that it ought to be easy to come to an understanding."

"This evolution of Grey's reveals courage.

"In conclusion—as long as the Sultan remains at Constantinople, Grey will agree to everything calculated to maintain the peace."

Grey could not afford to have the Sultan driven from Constantinople, though such was the plan of the Balkan allies.

The whole of Russia's scheme was not yet understood in London and Paris. On November, 18-21, 1912, in No. 675, Sazonoff had occasion to instruct his ambassador at London.

RUSSIA CONCEALED FACTS FROM GREY.

Sazonoff to London Envoy: "Lately the French minister for foreign affairs has repeatedly emphasized during his conversations with M. Iswolsky (Russian ambassador at Paris) that it appeared to him highly desirable that more explicit information concerning the substance of the Serbo-Bulgarian alliance and Russia's attitude in the question be given to Grey. * * * You may tell him (Grey) the Russian government has been aware of the fact that Gueshoff had at the time given information to the London cabinet as to this subject through the medium of the British minister at Sofia; IT WAS, THEREFORE, NOT NECESSARY FOR YOU TO SPEAK TO GREY EXPLICITLY ABOUT THIS TREATY. THE LESS SO AS THIS TREATY WAS TO BE KEPT STRICTLY SECRET BY THE TWO INTERESTED GOVERNMENTS."

Sazonoff knew what he wanted and he was not at all shy in letting Sir Edward Grey know his wishes. The peace treaty of Bucharest shows that he had his eye to the very end, for with that instrument he got even with Bulgaria for daring to want all she had been promised in return for shedding her blood in behalf of Turkey.

He accepted the following proposals from France to decide the fate of Constantinople, and wired to the Russian ambassador at London:

"1. The powers will take a collective step with the belligerent states for a suspension of hostilities.

"2. The sovereignty of the Sultan at Constantinople and in the adjoining territory will be maintained without any restrictions.

"3. In the remaining parts of European Turkey the national, political and administrative institutions will be changed in accordance with the requirements of each district; this to be done in such a manner that the interests of all interested states will be balanced.

"4. For this purpose of jointly settling the various questions involved, the powers will meet at a conference to which the belligerent states and Rumania shall also be invited."

Sazonoff's scheme for shearing Bulgaria and gradually working to a position of mastery at Constantinople fitted in neither with that of the entente nor the Russian, French, and British intentions. To remain a political combination to the sort they were, the powers had to maintain the status quo along the Straits, which was the sole reason why the total elimination of the Caliph in Europe was not favored.

Great Britain, besides having prime interests in keeping the Bosphorus and Dardanelles closed to the Russians, whenever that should become necessary, had to consider also the feelings of the Mohammedan world—her Islamic colonies.

France did not want to have Russia boss the Mediterranean, and Russia felt that just then the moment was not come to occupy Constantinople and the Straits herself, simply because Great Britain and France would not consent to that.

GREY ACTED SPOKESMAN FOR RUSSIAN PLANS.

Benckendorff to M. Sazonoff. Telegram dated October 20, November 2, 1912, No. 205.

"Your telegrams 2403 and 2405 received. I have spoken to Grey. He says it is impossible to ask the Bulgarians

to halt before the line of Chatalja, because that would mean sacrifice which might enable the Turks to concentrate again and frustrate the results hitherto attained in the war.

"He says that public opinion in England would express itself so categorically in favor of Bulgaria that he could not put forward such a demand. He thinks he may assume that your telegram was dispatched before the news of the latest victory of the Bulgarians, which seems to have been a decisive one, has arrived.

"This morning Grey showed me an authorized Bulgarian statement in the Times. It reads:

"If the Bulgarian troops enter Constantinople, they will do so for the purpose of dictating the peace there and will then immediately withdraw from the capital."

"Grey said he would take this statement as a point of departure for an interview with the Bulgarian minister here. After this interview had taken place, Grey told me the following: He had first asked the minister whence this statement emanated. Madjoroff replied that it came from him and expressed his personal opinion.

"Grey in reply said that he spoke as a friend of Bulgaria and called to witness the demonstrations of sympathy of the English for the Bulgarian cause; he need not remind him of the sympathy of Russia, but he could only add that the standpoint of Russia with regard to Constantinople had been fixed ever since the beginning of the crisis.

"It was, therefore, of the utmost importance that Bulgaria should, as soon as possible, remove the apprehensions of the Russian government with regard to her intentions concerning Constantinople, for otherwise Bulgaria, threatened as she already was, with a pressure from Rumania and perhaps also from Austria, might lose the sympathies of Russia and find herself in an extremely difficult position."

Grey's solicitous expression in the interests of Russia in the straits was scant. He could have informed Sazonoff that the British Government had no objection to the Russian Black Sea fleet appearing before the Turkish capital with Great Britain's permission to make Russia master of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. The would have been a short cut, and none but France would have objected, so far as maritime interests were involved.

RUSSIA OPPOSES LONG OCCUPATION.

"We wish to oppose the temporary

occupation of Constantinople by the Allies. But we wish to point out how difficult further negotiations would become in that case. If the Ottoman Government leaves Constantinople and withdraws to Asia Minor, it need fear no further losses; the Turkish army would be able to recover from the blows it has lately received, and there would be no necessity for the Sublime Porte to show any disposition to yield, because the situation could not become much worse.

"On the other hand, a prolonged occupation of Constantinople by the Allies might force us likewise to send our fleet, which would remain there precisely as long as the Allies. We think, therefore, that the Powers should now decide whether they want to accede to Turkey's request and take the necessary steps for mediation."

GERMANY'S DIPLOMACY WAIVED OFF BREAK.

It was the extreme moderation of Austria-Hungary and Germany at the Bucharest conference that followed the above moves on the great Balkan checkerboard which averted a calamity in those days. Germany had no direct interests involved, and in her endeavor to please the desperate Sazonoff sided with him against Bulgaria in the negotiations at Bucharest by means of which Sazonoff penalized the Bulgars for all the anxious moments they had given him.

Austria-Hungary had given up her claims upon Novi-Basar, and in denying the Serbs a port on the Adriatic had done Great Britain a poor service of the first magnitude, because the British government would have been obliged in the end to tell Sazonoff that Serbia was not to get such a port, except Serbia promised not to allow Russia to make use of the port as a Russian naval base in the Mediterranean.

That would have been the end of the Entente, naturally, and from being the isolator of the Central Powers, Great Britain would have fallen to the position of the isolated—provided always that Grey would not

have assured Russia in the eleventh hour that England would join her and France in a general war.

TREATY OF BUCHAREST CLOSED CHAPTER.

The treaty of Bucharest closed this chapter of diplomatic intrigue in the Balkans. But only for a few months. The activity of Mr. Hartwig in Belgrade and Russian support of the infamous Narodna Odrbrana political society reopened the question on June 28, 1914, by the assassination of Arch-

duke Francis Ferdinand, of which plot Serbian government officials, including the Crown Prince Alexander, had prior knowledge, and to which crime the Serbian government became an accessory before the fact. By that time M. Hartwig had been assassinated himself, but his spirit traveled on. Meanwhile Sazonoff tried his luck with "crises" in Persia, employing quite openly the methods of the assassin in the slaying of thousands of innocent civilians, as the next chapter will show.

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